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6. ALBINO GAUR AT THE NAGARHOLE NATIONAL PARK, KARNATAKA

(With one plate)

On April 11, 2001, at about 0630 hrs, while going around Nagarhole National Park, in Kodagu district, Karnataka State, I spotted a herd of gaur *Bos gaurus* at a salt lick on the Chikkapala road. To my great surprise and wonder, an albino calf was moving in the herd. The sun had not risen, the day was cloudy and the light very poor. But fortunately, my camera had a 400 ASA film and 80-200 lens with f 2.8 aperture (Plate 1, Fig. 1), which helped me take several good pictures of the calf, even though the light was poor. The calf was entirely snow-white, and it was about six months old. I have

been going to all the sanctuaries of Karnataka for the last three decades, but it was for the first time that I saw an albino gaur. My friends T.N.A. Perumal and Dr. S.R. Jayaprakash, both from Bangalore, and Arunthavaselvan T.R.A of Coimbatore were with me. It was a rare sighting worth recording.

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7. OCCURRENCE OF THE WILD WATER BUFFALO *BUBALUS ARNEE* IN MIZORAM AND MANIPUR

(With one text-figure)

The Asiatic wild water buffalo *Bubalus arnee* Kerr (*bubalis* Linn.) has become very rare all over its former range. It is common only in a few protected areas of Assam, e.g. Kaziranga, Manas and Dibru-Saikhowa. Information on the current status and distribution is given by Choudhury (1994). The species usually occurs in tall grasslands in the plains. However, its presence in the Balpakram National Park of Garo Hills, Meghalaya and adjacent areas (Choudhury 1994) has been a matter of curiosity as well as question. But it seems that the small grassy patches along the rivers and streams, in the depressions and on tableland in hilly areas, also harbour buffalo populations, apparently in lower density than the plains. After the Balpakram

experience, I had reason to believe that the wild buffalo also occurred in other hilly regions of northeastern India in the recent past, although no documentation had been done. However, because of hunting pressure from various tribal groups, it has vanished from most such areas.

During a recent visit to Mizoram in February 2001, I came across a massive horn of a bull wild buffalo at a house in Aizawl city, the state capital. On enquiry, I came to know that it was collected from Vaitin, a village in Aizawl district, in far northern Mizoram (24° 12' N, 92° 58' E) (Fig. 1). The interstate border with Manipur is not far from the village, about 5 km only. The buffalo was reportedly shot around 1976 inside Manipur. The locality of shooting



Fig. 1: Albino gaur at a salt lick on the Chikkapala road

was in Tipaimukh area of Churachandpur district, Manipur (c. 24° 12' N, 93° 00' E), not far from Vaitin. The villagers of both Manipur and Mizoram were aware of the presence of a few wild buffaloes in the area in the 1960s and early 1970s. This particular specimen was well known in Vaitin area of Mizoram and adjacent areas of Manipur till its death for its majestic horns, and it reportedly had a massive body. Its horns measured (in cm): maximum spread 152.0; tip-to-tip (span) 105.0; sweep across forehead 278.5; individual horn (right) 130.0; individual horn (left) 125.0; girth at base (right) 44.0; girth at base (left) 44.5. The conspicuous characteristic of the horns that I noticed was fewer curves.

The area where small numbers survived till the 1970s is near the confluence of the Tipai (Tuivai) river with that of the Barak. Along both these rivers, there were narrow grassy plains with tall reeds such as *Phragmites karka*, *Neyraudia reynaudiana*, *Arundo donax* and *Saccharum* spp., providing habitat for small numbers of wild

buffaloes. The larger horn size of some domestic buffaloes in northeastern Mizoram and southwestern Manipur also indicates the occurrence of wild buffaloes in the area in the recent past.

There are no reports on the occurrence of wild buffalo in Manipur and Mizoram in the recent past (Choudhury 1994, Gee 1964, Stracey 1963). However, there are records from Hailakandi and Cachar districts of southern Assam, of which some sites were very close to northern Mizoram (Choudhury 2001) (see Fig. 1).

Poaching for meat by the Mizo, Kuki (including Hmars), and Paite tribes, was the main reason for the elimination of wild buffalo population in the area. Clearing for wet paddy cultivation in the narrow river valleys has also resulted in loss of habitat, which was already very small. This record confirmed that the wild buffalo existed in Manipur and Mizoram even in 1970s, but is now perhaps 'locally extinct' from these

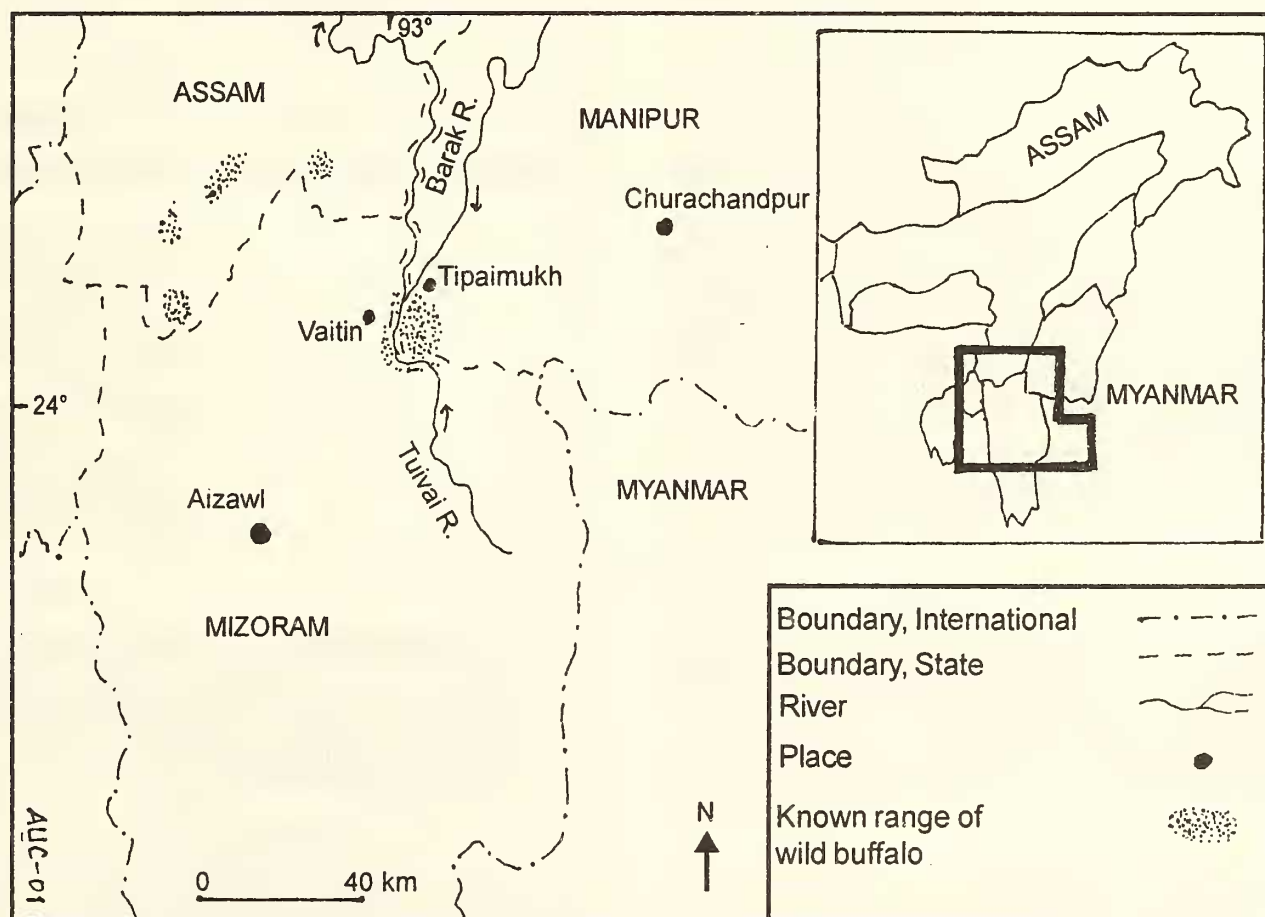


Fig. 1: Map showing the places mentioned in the text

two states.

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8. GREY HERON *ARDEA CINEREA* SCAVENGING ON CATTLE CARCASS

On January 1, 2000 at 1830 hrs while returning from a bird watching trip to Gangapur Dam, 14 km west of Nashik (Maharashtra), we saw 35 Indian white-backed vultures *Gyps bengalensis* roosting on two large mango (*Mangifera indica*) trees. As it was dusk, we could not investigate why the vultures were attracted to the mango trees. The next day, at 1600 hrs, we reached the same site. While approaching the mango trees, we saw 18 black kites *Milvus migrans migrans* circling low over a pair of cow carcasses 200 m ahead. There were also a number of house crows *Corvus splendens*, two Indian white-backed vultures *Gyps bengalensis* and three dogs feeding on the carcasses. Surprisingly, we also found a grey heron *Ardea cinerea* watching the carcasses from a distance of c. 40 cm. It began edging towards

the carcass and then suddenly and swiftly came upon the kill, and tearing a chunk of meat moved 2 m away to feed on it. This is strange behaviour on the part of the grey heron, which normally feeds on fish, frogs, etc. (Ali and Ripley 1983). Snow *et al.* (1998) mentioned the food of grey heron as chiefly fish, amphibians, small mammals, insects and reptiles; occasionally crustaceans, molluscs, worms and plant material. Grey heron scavenging on a carcass in grasslands is quite unusual.

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